

First National Bank  
Huntsville, Alabama

*Madison Co.*

HABS No. 16-405

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey  
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer  
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

Project #16-405  
THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK

Huntsville, Alabama

HISTORICAL DATA:

Built: 1835-1836.  
Architect: George Steele.  
Purchase price of property: \$ 9,687.85  
Cost of building: 64,812.85  
Cost of furniture: 1,292.82  
Total cost: \$75,793.52

Ownership:

The Branch Bank of the State of Alabama at Huntsville was the original owner. 1835-1857.

The Northern Bank of Alabama, 1857-1865.

The National Bank of Huntsville, 1865-1889.

The First National Bank of Huntsville, 1889 to now.

The Directors of the Branch Bank of the State of Alabama at Huntsville: These were the first directors, elected January 9, 1835:

Bartley M. Lows, president, Thomas Brandon, James Bradley, Hugh Caperton, Richard Campbell, Daniel Coleman, James J. Donegan, Stephen S. Ewing, Alva Finley, Thomas Fearn, Arthur F. Hopkins, Francois F. Mastin, Benjamin Patterson, Edward W. Parker, John Read, Henry Stokes, and Preston Yeatman.

End of the Branch Bank:

Due to the panic of 1837. The State Bank charter expired January 1, 1844. A commission was appointed by the legislature in 1846 to settle the affairs of the bank. Affairs were settled by 1853.

The Northern Bank of Alabama:

Purchased the bank property in 1857. This bank prospered until the Civil War. Then the assets of the bank were placed in a burlap bag and hid inside the chimney behind the teller's cage.

During the War the building was used as a commissary by the Federal troops occupying Huntsville. Tradition says that the Yankee soldiers spent many an hour hunting the suspected treasure, but never did find it.

Project #16-405

The National Bank of Huntsville:

Organized in 1865, with the following directors:

William H. Echols.	James R. Stevens.
Algernon Fletcher.	Herman Weil.
Oliver B. Patton.	James H. Mastin.

Building rented at \$100 per month during 1865.  
Building leased for \$2,000 per year in 1866.  
Building bought for \$30,000 in 1867.

Death of Theophilus Lacy, February 10, 1874:

Cashier of bank for all institutions using this building. The following was taken from the minutes of a directors' meeting for February 24, 1874:

"Since the last meeting of the board, Theophilus Lacy, the beloved and worthy cashier of the National Bank of Huntsville, died at his residence within these walls, on Tuesday night, Feb. 10, 1874, at the age of 70 years, one month, 10 days."

The First National Bank of Huntsville:

In 1889, the board of the bank voted to change the name of this bank to the above.

Source of Material:

Historic Homes, by Pat Jones, published in the Huntsville Times, August 13, 20, 27, 1933.

*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*

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ARCHITECTURAL MERIT AND DATA:

The First National Bank of Huntsville, originally the Branch Bank of the State of Alabama, is one of the few bank buildings in existence today still used for the same purpose as intended approximately one hundred years ago. This building possesses definite bank character. The banking screens are today used the same as they were originally, as is also the masonry bank vault, which latter, however, has been steel lined since.

A striking peculiarity of this bank structure is the inclusion of a specific requirement of living quarters for the cashier in the bank building proper. This fact, at the same time, makes the building no doubt one of the first apartment buildings in the United States or the South. The other peculiarity is the existence still of the slave living quarters in a connected building at the rear. This slave building also has quarters in a lower basement story for the detention of slave property in case of mortgage default.

An additional peculiarity of the structure is that it is built on a cliff directly over the famous Huntsville Spring which was the original cause of the settlement of Huntsville, and to which a canal was built from the Tennessee River, which canal is still in existence today.

This building was actually designed and superintended by an architect, Mr. George Steele.

The foundation walls were built of stone slabs quarried near by. The building walls, approximately two feet thick, were built of brick over which stucco was applied. It is said that the column bases, column shafts and capitals were hauled from Baltimore to the headwater of the Tennessee River by ox-cart, then floated down the river to Triana, and from there barged to the site by means of a canal which had been finished prior to the erection of the building. The ceilings are approximately sixteen feet high and the windows and doors were throughout supplied with brass hardware, some of which is still in existence today. Shutters fold back into a compartment on either side of the windows, which shutters give the appearance of jamb paneling when in housed position. These shutters at night were secured by a bar, sockets for which still are in place.

Project #16-405

Foot scrapers, and other objects of interest, are in existence today. The peculiar location of the building and the existence of the slave quarters in the rear, very well proportioned and designed, today attract visitors from far and wide.

Source of Material:

Compiled from articles by Mr. Pat Jones of the Huntsville Times, issues of August 6, 13, 20, 27, 1933; and Mr. Philip Mewhinney of the measuring force.

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Administrator, HABS, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*